



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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By: Lt. Bernie Kale

Alaska Air National Guardsmen rescue teen on the Gulkana River

CAMP DENALI, Alaska—Airmen with the Alaska Air National Guard's 210th, 211th and 212th Rescue Squadrons rescued a 17-year-old boy who had sustained a leg injury while floating down the Gulkana River, 25 nautical miles from Glenallen, Alaska, August 5.

The 11th Air Force Rescue Coordination Center on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson picked up concurrent distress signals from a personal locator beacon and a SPOT beacon shortly before 6 p.m. Monday.

"We called the Alaska State Troopers to find out if they had also seen the notifications from the Gulkana River," said Master Sgt. Armando Soria, a search and rescue controller with the 11th Air Force Rescue Coordination Center. "They confirmed the distress signals but were unable to support the rescue because of the unknown terrain and medical condition of the victim."

Utilizing a HH-60 Pave Hawk helicopter from the Alaska Air National Guard 210th Rescue Squadron and a HC-130 King aircraft from the 211th Rescue Squadron, with Guardian Angels from the 212th Rescue Squadron onboard both airframes, rescuers launched from JBER enroute to the location of the injured teen.

A group of 10 individuals canoeing down the Gulkana had spotted the injured teen and his father on the side of the river. They went to the shore to check on the condition of the two.

"Once the group of good Samaritans discovered the victim's leg injury, they activated their own PLB and SPOT beacons to request help," Soria explained.

The HC-130 King was the first to locate the group near the river, and the HH-60 Pave Hawk arrived 15 minutes later.

"We saw the group waving their oars in the air, letting us know that we were at the right location," said Capt. Gary Weir, 211th Rescue Squadron HC-130 King pilot and mission

commander. "The SPOT locator and PLB beacon worked really well in letting us know the exact location of the distressed."

The HH-60 Pave Hawk lowered the two Guardian Angels down to the location, where they picked up the victim and carried him roughly 500 meters to a location more suited for the helicopter, according to Weir.

"After they got on scene, the pararescuemen determined that the terrain would not support the Pave Hawk landing," Weir said. "So, they carried the victim and assisted his father to a better area to provide a short hoist operation to the helicopter."

Once the victim, his father and the Guardian Angels were hoisted up, the Pave Hawk refueled from the HC-130 King and transported the patient and his father to an Anchorage hospital by 11:46 p.m., according to Soria.

"We're the only search-and-rescue asset in Alaska that can perform in-air refueling operations," Soria said. "And if we didn't have that capability, it would be next to impossible to accomplish a mission like this without stopping for gas."

The Alaska Air National Guard's 210th, 211th and 212th Rescue Squadrons were awarded one save for this mission.

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